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# Iannone, Carol: News Articles (1991): News Article 43

Kim Masters

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THURSDAY, JULY 18, 1991

# *NEH Nominee Rejected In Senate*

**Iannone Unqualified,  
Panel Democrats Say**

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By Kim Masters  
Washington Post Staff Writer

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A Senate committee narrowly defeated Carol Iannone's nomination to the National Endowment for the Humanities' advisory council yesterday, ending an acrimonious political struggle over what normally would be a minor appointment to an unpaid post.

Despite strenuous efforts by endowment Chairman Lynne Cheney and an assist from Vice President Quayle, the Labor and Human Resources Committee voted 9-8 against the nomination. The vote went along party lines except for Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, the only Democrat who supported Iannone.

Iannone's backers invoked the specter of political correctness, insisting that liberals targeted her because she has written attacks on African American and feminist authors. The opposition maintained that Iannone, a 43-year-old adjunct professor at the Gallatin division of New York University, lacked the scholarly distinction to serve on the 26-member panel. The council meets four times a year to advise the NEH chairman on grant proposals.

Speaking for the first time since the controversy began several months ago, Iannone said yesterday her "main reaction is surprise" that committee Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) had cast the debate in terms of her qualifications.

"When I visited with him, he told me that qualifications were not an issue, that academic politics were the nastiest kind of politics," Iannone said. "He expressed reservations about some of the views given in my essays, particularly a view of mental illness in a review of William Styron's book about depression." According to Iannone, Kennedy "said

See IANNONE, D2, Col. 5

# Iannone Defeated For Post

IANNONE, From D1

he felt it was a little bit high-handed in its handling of mental illness."

Iannone's review of "Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness" challenged the view that depression, alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases, observing that these problems "were once seen as lapses in character or morality."

Styron "sounds like a second-rate Poe or Coleridge as he attempts, sensationalistically, melodramatically, to conjure up the horrors" of his affliction, she wrote. Styron emerged from depression, she concluded, when his "self-absorption was suddenly broken."

In the critique, which appeared in the November 1990 issue of *Commentary*, Iannone wrote that Alcoholics Anonymous describes alcoholism as a disease "mainly for the purposes of relieving the alcoholic of useless self-condemnation."

Asked about his conversation with Iannone, Kennedy said through a spokesman: "She has written numerous controversial articles, but those were not the issue. Regrettably, she simply didn't have the qualifications to serve on this prestigious council. Her nomination generated unprecedented opposition from her peers."

Iannone's views on mental illness had not emerged previously as an issue in the debate over her nomination. Instead, discussion focused on "Literature by Quota," a *Commentary* article that questioned the achievements of black and women writers, including Charles Johnson ("Middle Passage"), Toni Morrison ("Beloved") and Alice Walker ("The Color Purple").

In the March issue of *Commentary*, Iannone alluded to "a tribalism" that led to honors for inferior writers. She alleged that "a group of black writers demanded and obtained the Pulitzer Prize" for Morrison in 1988.

Such academic groups as the Modern Language Association and the American Council of Learned Societies opposed Iannone's nomination, focusing on her academic achievements. But many of her defenders argued that she was subjected to a political litmus test. Among those speaking out were historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, Yale College Dean Donald Kagan, and commentators George Will and William Buckley.

Cheney kept the emphasis on politics after the vote. "Carol Iannone is a fine scholar and a fine person, as all the Republicans and one Democrat on the committee realized," she said in a statement. "It is a great disappointment that the rest of the Democrats voted her down. Moreover, her nomination has raised vital First Amendment issues and this vote will be widely seen as sanctioning limits on free expression."



SEN. EDWARD KENNEDY

The NEH chairman had pushed hard for Iannone's confirmation, asking for postponement of a vote in early June to give her more time to press her case. Quayle made calls in support of the nomination last week while Cheney escorted Iannone on visits to committee members.

"The vice president is disappointed," Quayle spokesman David Beckwith said yesterday. "He thinks she is exceptionally well qualified and we deplore this new type of character assassination."

Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), a key Iannone opponent, said yesterday that the nomination was an opportunity to halt a trend of slipping standards for appointments to the NEH panel. "Her record of service in the humanities is not a distinguished one and her qualifications do indeed fall short," he said. "I regret that she has become a symbol in a strident and rhetorical debate that far overshadows what this appointment is really about."

But Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) responded, "If this isn't political correctness, what the hell is it?" Saying Iannone is "superbly qualified" to serve, Hatch defended her academic record. "She's from a first-generation immigrant working-class family. She's a woman. It's tougher in those first years of academia. . . . And she's only 43 years old," he said.

Kennedy led the opposition to Iannone, comparing her record with that of Harvey Mansfield, a political science professor whose nomination to the NEH panel was approved yesterday. Kennedy said Iannone's work has been cited by other scholars only eight times over the past 10 years, according to the Arts and Humanities Citation Index and the Social Science Citation Index. Mansfield was cited 232 times in the same period, he said. Kennedy said Mansfield, 59, comes out way ahead of Iannone even if his achievements of the past 16 years are eliminated to factor out the age difference.

Iannone's list of scholarly publications, which took up a page and a half on her résumé, consisted mainly of articles in *Commentary* rather than publications in academic journals, he said. "Compare this . . . with the 4½ pages of books and articles [listed] by Harvey Mansfield," he

said. "The stark contrast is so overpowering."

Hatch responded that Iannone had "written a lot" for her age. "You could list a lot of people who didn't begin writing until after they were 43," he said.

Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.) said she supported Iannone. "She might not fit the criteria but I don't know that any great calamity is going to happen to the National Endowment for the Humanities," she said. "I have a high regard for Lyne Cheney, she feels strongly about this."

Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) concurred: "We are not nominating someone here to a Cabinet position," he said. "These people are not negotiating START treaties."

Phyllis Franklin, executive director of the Modern Language Association, said after the vote that her organization is "grateful" that the Senate committee "stood up for standards at the NEH."

The association was unaware at the outset that the fight would be so politicized, she said. "The publicity that Carol's supporters brought to the issue changed the outcome," she said. "The question in my mind has been all along, why did Mrs. Cheney push so hard on this?"

Franklin said various columnists who supported Iannone "have tried to ridicule the association and tried to make it a scapegoat. . . . The message for the humanities community is if you dare question anything, you open yourself up to heavy public attack."